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Philosophical Aspects of Bhakti in the Nārāyaṇīya

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Introduction

THE application of the text–historical method to the *Mahābhārata* has proceeded from prejudices enshrined in "higher criticism"[1] that derive more from German history than from any scientific understanding of the epic.[2] These prejudices variously produced a set of queer *Mahābhārata*s: an "Ur-epos", a "kṣatriya epic", an "Indo-European epic", an "Indo-Germanic epic", a "Bronze Age epic", an "oral epic", a "pre-Brāhmanical epic", and so on. The basic interpretive principle for most scholars appears to have been: anything but the *Mahābhārata* tradition as we have it. This deliberate neglect of the text as it exists in the tradition, and as it is reconstructed in the Critical Edition, permitted German scholars to construct a fetish text around theories of a heroic bardic or oral epic later contaminated by Brāhmanical ideology. In the absence of legitimate methodology and scientific evidence, scholars successively constructed theories of "inversion", "Brāhmanization", and "Kṛṣṇafication" to explain why the *Mahābhārata* did not live up to the pure text they postulated.[3]

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[1] For a discussion of the origins of the text–historical method and so-called higher criticism in Biblical criticism of the eighteenth century, and of its application to the Indian epic, see Adluri and Bagchee 2014.

[2] For a brief overview of nineteenth-century epic scholarship, especially as it deferred to Reformation and Enlightenment anxieties, see Adluri 2011b.

[3] The "inversion hypothesis" of the two Holtzmanns was quickly debunked even within so-called analytic scholarship (see Oldenberg 1921: 35-37, 107 n. 3; van Buitenen 1973: xxxii-xxxiii). In spite of near-universal rejection of

In this study, I question this form of unscientific philology by discussing one of the many tautologies that undergird interpretations that take nineteenth- and twentieth-century German scholarship seriously. The tautology is simple: the original *Mahābhārata* was a kṣatriya epic, therefore *bhakti* passages are late; because *bhakti* is late, the original must have been a kṣatriya epic. Thus, scholars consider the *Nārāyaṇīya* to be late and therefore not a crucial piece of the *Mahābhārata*'s overall literary architecture.[4] I will show how speaking of a generalized "*bhakti* doctrine" is another construction of this scholarship of the past two centuries. The Critical Edition makes it possible to see that *bhakti* was always a part of the *Mahābhārata* as witness texts attest to it.[5] Biardeau rightly argues that the *Mahābhārata* is the "principal — and undoubtedly the most ancient — of all monuments to bhakti" (1989: 170 n. 1). Hiltebeitel, building on Biardeau's work, has likewise argued that "the Mahābhārata in its classical form is a work of *bhakti* through and through". As he notes, whatever "one hypothesizes by way of sources for the story in earlier mythology, heroic legend . . . or possible history, there are no passages or incidents which on their own permit the reconstruction of either pre-*bhakti* stages of mythologization or a historical pre-'divinized' or premythological core" (1984: 1-2). Indeed, it is possible to see — simply by reading the *Mahābhārata*[6] — that *bhakti* is an essential component of its literary-philosophical argument.

$\longrightarrow$ the theory as nonsensical, it has recently been revived by Fitzgerald (see Fitzgerald 2010: 110-11, 119 n. 18), but is even less convincing in this new iteration.

[4] For a criticism of this view, and especially of the circular and unconvincing "Textgeschichte" of the *Nārāyaṇīya*, see Adluri 2011d.

[5] For a discussion of the Critical Edition and how it separates possible scholarship from meaningless speculation, see Adluri and Bagchee forthcoming.

[6] I.e. the Critical Edition, with interpolations below the line and in the appendices providing further evidence of the importance of *bhakti* to the epic. As I have discussed my views on the Critical Edition elsewhere (see previous note), especially why I consider it to provide an accurate guideline to the *Mahābhārata* archetype, I will not enter into the issue here.

The Nārāyaṇīya in the Mahābhārata

The text I will be focusing on in this paper is the *Nārāyaṇīya*.[7] The *Nārāyaṇīya*, which occurs at Mbh 12.321-39 towards the end of the Mokṣadharmaparvan of the Śāntiparvan, marks the culmination of the epic's cosmological, soteriological, and literary programme.[8] The first two sections of the Śāntiparvan — the Rājadharmaparvan and the Āpaddharmaparvan — present a number of dialogues and viewpoints on different aspects of *dharma*, covering especially *pravṛtti dharma* or the law of worldly existence. Various aspects of worldly existence are covered in these two sections: policy, conduct, and economic and social matters. These sections can be seen as corresponding to the first three *puruṣārtha*s, the *trivarga* of *dharma, artha*, and *kāma*. The fourth *puruṣārtha* — *mokṣa* — is then addressed in the final section of the Śāntiparvan, the Mokṣadharmaparvan. Thus, with this concluding section, the epic fulfils its stated goal of providing instruction on all four *puruṣārtha*s. It further fulfils its claim to being a Mokṣaśāstra, a soteriological text alongside and on a par with the four Vedas.

However, even within the Mokṣadharmaparvan, we find subtle distinctions. The book does not simply enunciate a dogmatic doctrine concerning final liberation, but is structured as a series of discourses and narratives concerning the trajectories of individual figures (the brāhmaṇa Paippalādi, King Janaka, Śuka, etc.). The *mokṣa* narrative of this *parvan* ends with Śuka's ascent beyond the twin peaks of Meru and Himavat, an ascent that also represents the culmination of debates on different ways to attain *mokṣa*. A new beginning is made from the *Nārāyaṇīya* onward, which addresses the question of how to universalize the yogic path followed by Śuka. It is this concern with universalizing the wisdom

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[7] A number of other texts such as the *Bhagavadgītā* or *Anugītā* could also have been selected. However, it is my contention that the *Nārāyaṇīya* provides us with the fullest articulation of the ontological foundations of *bhakti*.

[8] For translations, see Ganguli 1891: 739-866; Esnoul 1979. Laine provides a translation of Nārada's vision of the One on Śvetadvīpa (Mbh 12.326; Laine 1989: 190-201). Sullivan provides a translation of Mbh 12.337 where Vaiśampāyana reveals that Vyāsa is an incarnation of Hari (Sullivan 1990: 120-23).

of the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads that makes the *Nārāyaṇīya* the paradigmatic text for studying the emergence and evolution of *bhakti*. As I will demonstrate, the *Nārāyaṇīya* is intimately concerned with this problem of how to convey the insight into the relation of "being" and "becoming" and of the "One" to the "many".[9] It is this insight, which is ontological, cosmological, and soteriological, that first makes *bhakti* possible as a cult-emotive phenomenon, and not vice versa. Thus any study of *bhakti* must begin by understanding how the *Nārāyaṇīya* first engenders *bhakti* as a soteriological path accessible to all. This text puts forward not only a well-developed theology and cosmology, but also a rich iconographic, devotional, and ritual programme.

In this respect, we can invert the existing historicist paradigm (which considers the *Nārāyaṇīya* to be "late") to show that the *Nārāyaṇīya* is not only original, but also "originary" in that it becomes the paradigmatic text for the evolution of the later Purāṇas.[10]

The Nārāyaṇīya in Text–Historical Perspective

Early *Nārāyaṇīya* scholarship focused on identifying the religious sects thought to be behind the text, based on names or phrases found in the *Nārāyaṇīya* (Grierson 1908: 251-62, 373-86; Bhandarkar 1927 [1889], 1913). Schrader held the Nāradīya section of the *Nārāyaṇīya* to be the earliest extant Pāñcarātra Saṃhitā, although he also argued that the existence of others earlier than or contemporaneous with it could not be ruled out (Schrader 1916: 14-15; see also van Buitenen 1962). A number of articles also sought to identify the location of Śvetadvīpa or White Island (Clark 1919: 209-42; Rönnow 1929: 253-84).[11] Recent studies include those by

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[9] See Adluri 2014 for a discussion of this problem in the context of a comparison with Plotinian thought.

[10] On the distinction between "original" and "originary", see Adluri 2011a. I borrow the concepts from Reiner Schürmann.

[11] All such attempts implicitly go back to Weber, who in his 1850 text identified Śvetadvīpa with a location off Alexandria, or perhaps in Asia Minor. I discuss Weber's work below. In his translation, Ganguli records the views of an unnamed writer in the *Calcutta Review* who proposes that "the whole passage refers to the impression made on certain Hindu pilgrims upon witnessing →

Doris Srinivasan (on the iconography of the *caturmukha*; Srinivasan 1979), Sanjukta Gupta (on the origins of the *caturvyūha* doctrine; Gupta 1971), and Madeleine Biardeau (on the literary and philosophical significance of the Nara–Nārāyaṇa pair; Biardeau 1991).

In 1997, a group of scholars produced a comprehensive study of the text, applying the "text–historical method" (Schreiner 1997a); but their assumptions and methodology remain questionable.[12] For example, their basic assumption that the *Nārāyaṇīya* "lacks homogeneity, i.e. shows clear traces of the fact that the text has been changed more than once in the course of its redaction history" (Schreiner 1997b: 1) is based on *opinio*, and not on *recensio*.[13] This assumption leads their account of the text's genesis and development astray. Thus, Thomas Oberlies first divides the *Nārāyaṇīya* into two parts, A and B, and then divides part B into five parts. However, he does not present any argument for cutting up the text into arbitrary, subjective, and unrelated divisions other than (his perception of) "Textbruchstellen" or "textual break passages", that is, points at which "the theoretical [*inhaltlich*] — and especially the narrative — logic is (significantly) interrupted" (Oberlies 1997a: 76). I would like to consider two examples here:

1. The "break" between Yudhiṣṭhira's question to Bhīṣma (12.322.13-14) and the subsequent Vasu narrative (12.322.16-124).

2. The "break" between the first Vasu narration (12.322-23) and the second (12.324). Oberlies argues that the second narration must be an "interpolation" because, whereas in the first one the king is shown performing an Aśvamedha with herbs (i.e. as a bloodless sacrifice), in the second he advocates sacrificing animals.

→ the celebration of the Eucharist according to the ordinances of the Roman Catholic Church" (Ganguli 1891: 752 n.).

[12] For other criticisms of the work of the *Nārāyaṇīya-Studien* scholars, see Hiltebeitel 2006: 227-55.

[13] In this paper I often present my own translations from German or French, without including the original.

Regarding the first of these examples, Oberlies justifies his thesis of a break on the grounds that "the Vasu narrative narrated by Bhīṣma does not in any way answer the questions raised by Yudhiṣṭhira. . . . The entire narrative is completely irrelevant to the questions raised! In 12,322. (13)16 lies a clearly manifest break in the text" (1997a: 92-93). However, contrary to this view, there is a sustained philosophical logic to the text. The narrative moves from Yudhiṣṭhira's incipient question regarding the highest God, to Nārada's encounter with the Nara–Nārāyaṇa pair, to his journey to view Nārāyaṇa's highest form and his encounter with the dyadic beings of Śvetadvīpa. Yudhiṣṭhira's subsequent question regarding the origins of these dyadic beings necessitates a discussion of the soteriological ascent, which is presented in the form of the narrative of King Vasu. In perfect harmony with the context, Bhīṣma explores the tension between the *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* paths, the one based on sacrifice and outwardly turned, the other based on devotion or yogic constancy and inwardly turned. Whereas the former leads away from the One (experienced paradigmatically as a "fall" from "being"), the latter leads towards the One. Understandably, one of the steps on the path from the many to the One is precisely the dyad: this is the secret of the origin of the Śvetadvīpa beings. This is a philosophical answer to a philosophical question, and one that fully exploits the symbolic resources of the epic.

Regarding the second example, Oberlies justifies his thesis on the grounds that "absolutely no motive is presented for the king's remarkable 'change of mind'. This confirms the text's suggestion that with part 2 a narrative was *taken over*" (1997a: 94). A closer look, however, shows that the *Nārāyaṇīya* programmatically contrasts Vasu's bloodless sacrifice in the first narrative with his decision in favour of the gods (who insist on animal sacrifice) in the second. This sudden and surprising shift cannot be accidental. If, as Oberlies suggests, the passage was "interpolated" into the text, the alleged "redactor" could easily have harmonized the two accounts.

Once again, the text is making a philosophical point: King Vasu first ascertains that the gods favour animal sacrifice, and then sides with them against the sages and their *nivṛtti* values. His choice of *pravṛtti* over

nivṛtti further recalls an earlier incident in the Ādiparvan, where Indra was able to dissuade him from pursuing austerities in return for his friendship (Mbh 1.57.1-31). In deciding in favour of *pravṛtti*, Vasu falls. Thus, far from illustrating the worn-out cliché of vindictive brāhmaṇas (this is how Oberlies takes it),[14] the text makes a sober point about the inconstancy of the *pravṛtti* order: it is transactional, conditioned, finite, and eternally subject to reversal. Thus the two narratives are perfectly consonant once we appreciate the philosophical point about Vasu's turn away from *nivṛtti dharma* and its non-violent symbolic or internalized sacrifice. In fact, in a concluding section, Bhīṣma narrates how Vasu, having realized that the *pravṛtti* ascent is always subject to a reversal and a fall, turns to the highest *dharma* of them all: the *uñchavṛtti dharma* (way of gleaning), where the king subsists on *vasudhāra*, the run-off from the sacrificial offerings.[15] Thus from purely *pravṛtti dharma* to *nivṛtti dharma*, and finally to their mediation and resolution in the concept of *uñchavṛtti dharma*, the text weaves its way back and forth in the Vasu narratives, superbly negotiating the vicissitudes of each *dharma* in its effort to identify a practical and permanent solution to the problem of how to attain *mokṣa* within "becoming".

This brief discussion of the pseudo-problems that arise from a failure to understand the text, and of the pseudo-historical solutions proposed for resolving them, must suffice here. My aim in this section was merely to illustrate how the "text–historical method" fails to illuminate the text. Oberlies's work was chosen not only because the other *Nārāyaṇīya-Studien* scholars all uncritically accept his account of the *Nārāyaṇīya*'s "textual history", but also because the criticisms of his approach apply to their work as well. With this overview of the problems with the so-called text–historical method and the untenability of its pseudo-critical reconstructions, we can now approach the question of *bhakti* in the *Nārāyaṇīya* in a more intelligent way. Contrary to the approach taken by Oberlies, Schreiner, Malinar et al., there can be no question of *bhakti*

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[14] See Oberlies 1997a: 110-11; 1997b: 146-48. This view has a long history in epic scholarship, but has been ably criticized in Bagchee 2011.

[15] For a more detailed analysis of the Vasu narratives, see Adluri 2011d.

as a pre-fabricated doctrine (either as a so-called "*bhakti*-Lehre" or a "*bhakti*-Religion") that later redactors simply built into their "redacted" *Mahābhārata*. This view of *bhakti* — as part of a "Vaiṣṇava theology" or a "Nārāyaṇa theology" that was simply lying around to be inserted into the epic by anyone at any time — proves to be a misunderstanding, itself occasioned by a simplistic and aggressively defended view of the *Mahābhārata* as a "kṣatriya epic".[16] Rather, *bhakti* is the ontological–soteriological solution the entire epic is leading up to: in the cognitive–existential stance towards "becoming" named by *bhakti*, the epic sees the final and abiding solution to the problem of destruction in time. This destructive aspect of time unfolds paradigmatically as the *raṇayajña* ("sacrifice of battle") on Kurukṣetra. The *bhakti* stance, I emphasize, is not an irrational transposition of oneself into a state of ecstasy, nor a genuflection out of faith alone before a deity characterized as an absolute Other, but an ontological insight into the relation of "being" and "becoming". It is a simultaneous combination or synthesis of various modes of philosophical analysis and self-transformation informed by sacrifice, technical philosophical inquiry, yogic praxis, and so on. We will see how the *Nārāyaṇīya* helps us to understand this extraordinary synthesis, this "grandiose edifice, stupefying in its coherence and unity", as Biardeau calls it (Biardeau and Malamoud 1976: 106).

Bhakti from the Perspective of Religious History

In her book *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective*, the historian Krishna Sharma provides a good overview of how a theory of *bhakti* as a religion was constructed in stages, beginning with the "writings of H.H. Wilson, Albrecht Weber, Lorinser, Monier-Williams and George A. Grierson" (1987: 12). She traces how the first seed of what was to become the dogma on *bhakti* can be found in Wilson's *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*:

> Making a stray and casual observation about the Vaishṇavas of Bengal, he [Wilson] wrote: "their religion could be summed up in one

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[16] For criticisms of the view of the *Mahābhārata* as a "kṣatriya epic", see Sukthankar 1957; Hiltebeitel 2012-13.

word, 'bhakti'" . . . obviously referring to the Kṛishṇa cult of Gauḍīya Vaishṇavism. . . . Wilson's reference to bhakti as a religion opened the way in Western scholarship for treating Kṛishṇa bhakti as the 'bhakti religion', and for the subsequent identification of 'Bhakti religion' with Vaishṇavism in general. The writings of Albrecht Weber and Monier-Williams contributed most in this regard. The in-depth study of the Kṛishṇa cult undertaken by Weber made the link already established between Kṛishṇa-bhakti and 'Bhakti religion' more firm. . . . Lorinser, a contemporary of Weber . . . drew attention to the *Bhagavad Gītā* as its relevant scripture. — Sharma 1987: 12-13

Weber in fact explicitly drew on the *Nārāyaṇīya* in his study of 1850, to construct a view of *bhakti* as a monotheistic faith with Christian antecedents:

Whether the Ocean of Milk (which lies north of Mount Meru) . . . on whose northern shore lies çvetadvîpa (the white island . . .) on which the bhagavân lives see MBh. XII, 12778. 13051, where the people are white (çvetâ*h*), radiant like the moon (candrasamaprabhâ*h*) 12861 and ekântinas 12781 (monotheists cf. 13606) [also reflects similar ideas about geography]? Nârada (and before him already Ekata, Dvi*ta*, Trita 12771-86) journeyed there and from there brought back with him the Pa*n*carâtra doctrine . . . ; since this doctrine, as is clear from the Gopâla-Tâpanîyâ Up., refers to the worship of K*rishn*a (Vâsudeva) as the one God, the suspicion presents itself spontaneously to me that Brahmins arrived in Alexandria or even in Asia Minor over the sea during the period of the blossoming of early Christianity, and that they, having returned home to India, projected the monotheistic doctrine and other legends of Christianity that, due to the name [i.e., of Kṛṣṇa] recalled *Christ* the son of the *divine* Virgin, onto the local wise man or hero *Krishna Devakîputra* (son of Devakî '*divine*') who was perhaps already worshipped as being divine, and, furthermore, replacing the Christian doctrines by Sânkhya- or Yoga-philosophemes, perhaps on their part conversely influenced the formation of Gnostic sects. . . . The legends of the birth of K*rishn*a and his persecution by Kansa recall too obviously the relevant Christian sagas that their resemblance cannot be accidental. Indeed, the chronology is not an obstacle here, for, according to Lassen I, 623 the parts of the MBh., in which K*rishn*a

is worshipped as divine are of later origin (that is, in my view, from the period of the Purânas), and the genuine worship of Krishna can be dated to the 5th and 6th centuries.   — 1850: 399-400

Further, Weber related the *Nārāyaṇīya* to the worship of Kṛṣṇa as "one God", and related this sectarian form of worship to a religion centered in "beg[ging] for grace and hav[ing] faith in [God]". Weber also reinterpreted *bhakti* and *śraddhā* in a way that brought out their particularist strain, while simultaneously denying them any rational, universal significance. Thus he wrote:

> When I on p. 400 above already conjectured on the basis of a specific saga from the MBh. that the worship of Krishna in particular as the one God was occasioned by Brahmins becoming acquainted with Christianity, then I cannot escape giving voice to my further suspicion that in general the later exclusively monotheistic tendency of Indian sects that worship a particular personal God, beg for his grace and have faith in him (bhakti and çraddhâ) was influenced precisely by the Indians becoming acquainted with the corresponding doctrines of Christianity.   — ibid.: 423

In his 1868 book *Über die Kṛishṇajanmâshṭamî*, Weber translated *bhakti* with "Kraft des Glaubens" ("force of faith" or "power of faith", 1868: 321) and further argued that the Christian origins of the stories of Kṛṣṇa can hardly be doubted (1868: 339). Weber also cited the work of Wilson as commenting that "the remodelling of the ancient Hindu systems into popular forms and in particular the vital importance of faith were directly influenced by the diffusion of the Christian religion" (ibid.).[17] Weber's researches thus created a view of *bhakti* as a discrete phenomenon within Indian religious traditions, a step that facilitated scholarly attempts to propose various genealogies for the concept.

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[17] Weber quotes or rather misquotes the text from Speir (1856: 434), who herself misquotes Wilson. The latter says nothing about Hinduism being "directly" influenced by Christian doctrines, but at most concedes that it is "not impossible that the attempts to model the ancient systems into a popular form, by engrafting on them in particular the vital importance of faith, were indirectly influenced by the diffusion of the Christian religion" (Wilson 1825: 51; repr. 1865: 157).

Since *bhakti* was now only weakly rooted within the indigeneous Indian traditions, there was no need to understand how it might have developed out of these traditions themselves or in the context of one or more texts. This view is implicitly at the back of the *Nārāyaṇīya-Studien* scholars' conviction that *bhakti* does not need to be understood by means of the epic text itself, but simply as a kind of prefabricated component (available in various colours such as Nārāyaṇa-*bhakti*, Vāsudeva-*bhakti*, etc.) that different groups simply "interpolated" into the epic.

Sharma further traces the development of this view of *bhakti* as a form of vigorous grassroots theism via the work of Monier-Williams and Grierson. Monier-Williams especially propounded the view that the appeal of *bhakti* was based on its cult-emotive aspects. Thus he suggested:

> [T]he religious instincts of the mass of the Hindus found no real satisfaction in the propitiation of the forces of nature and spirits of the air, or in the cold philosophy of pantheism, or in homage paid to the memory of a teacher held to be nowhere existent. They needed devotion (bhakti) to personal and human gods, and these they were led to find in their own heroes. — 1891: 42-43

Monier-Williams also placed *bhakti* in explicit opposition to *jñāna* (ibid.: 71) and argued for seeing *bhakti* as marking a transition from "Brāhmanism" to "Hindūism" (ibid.: 54 and passim).[18] Even though, as we have seen, the seeds of such a view were already present in the work of Weber, Monier-Williams's work finally gave rise to the view, since accepted as canonical in scholarship, of *bhakti* as a form of sectarian worship drawing on strong emotional attachments and devoid of any cognitive, epistemic, or philosophical components.

Grierson not only accepted this opposition between *bhakti-mārga* on the one hand and *jñāna-mārga* and *karma-mārga* on the other (1910: 539), but also accepted Monier-Williams's view that *bhakti*, being dependent on the notion of a personal god, emerged at a later stage of Indian thought (ibid.). However, he went much further than Monier-Williams

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[18] The entire third chapter ("Hindūism a Development of Brāhmanism") of Monier-Williams 1891 is of interest.

in associating *bhakti* with kṣatriya circles. Borrowing a term from Hopkins, he identified the religion of "Madhyadeśa" or the "Midland" with "Brahmaism". In contrast, the religion of the "Outland" was identified with heroic "Kṣatriya" circles (ibid.: 540). This religion was characterized by its independent, free-thinking, critical, and rationalistic spirit. Grierson writes:

> It has long been recognized that the Aryans of the Outland were not, in later Vedic times, so thoroughly subjected to the religious influence of the Brāhmans as their kindred of the Midland. In the Outland the thinkers belonged rather to the Kṣatriya class, to whose learning and critical acumen witness is borne even in contemporary Brahmanical writings. — ibid.

Grierson proposed that *bhakti*, which he circumscribed as a "doctrine of monotheism", developed from "sun-worship", the "common heritage of both branches of the Aryan people — the Iranian and the Indian" (ibid.). Regarding the founder of the "monotheistic Bhāgavata religion", Grierson wrote:

> Under any circumstances . . . the following facts may be taken as accepted by most students of the subject: — The founder of the religion was one Kṛṣṇa (Krishna) Vāsudeva, a Kṣatriya. — ibid.

Grierson also argued that in the "older parts of the *Mahābhārata*" Kṛṣṇa appeared as a "mighty warrior and religious reformer" (ibid.).[19] This pure monotheistic worldview, however, did not last very long. Philosophical doctrines penetrated the (originally non-philosophical) Bhāgavata religion under the influence of the Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems. Thereafter it was "absorbed" by "Brahmaism", leading to its kṣatriya heroes (Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, etc.) or monotheistic deity (*bhagavān* or "the Adorable") being identified with the Brāhmanical "Pantheos" (ibid.: 541-42). This stage culminated in the emergence of the composite pantheon of kṣatriya incarnations of the Brāhmanical Viṣṇu (Rāma, etc.).[20] Finally, once these composite forms of worship had emerged,

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[19] This view is probably also at the root of Garbe's claim that "*Kṛṣṇaism was by nature an ethical Kṣatriya religion*" (Garbe 1921: 32).

[20] Grierson sees in Paraśurāma's defeat by Rāma (Dāśarathi) confirmation for ⟶

this "Brāhmanized Bhāgavatism", as Grierson calls it (ibid.: 542), also acquired or developed a set of "textbooks", viz. "the latter part of the twelfth book of the *Mahābhārata*, known as the *Nārāyaṇīya*, and the famous *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*" (ibid.).[21]

Sharma's researches show how a dogmatic view of *bhakti* as a sectarian, particularist phenomenon, lacking any universal or rational aspects or a relationship to a "real" God, and with a tendency to self-aggrandization and to close itself off vis-à-vis other sects, was developed in scholarship. It was important for me to trace the genealogy of this view of *bhakti* in scholarship, because it is this view that is at the root of the *Nārāyaṇīya-Studien* scholars' work when they speak of a "*bhakti*-Religion", "*bhakti*-Lehre", "*bhakti*-Beziehung", "*bhakti*-Bewegung", and so on. It is only on the basis of this view of *bhakti* that it makes sense to speak of different "sects" or "standpoints" (Pāśupata, Sātvata, Ekāntin, Pañcarātra, Bhāgavata, Sāṁkhya-Yoga, Veda, or Āraṇyaka) in the text, and to inquire about the "motivating grounds ('motives')" for these different "sects" or "standpoints" to insert themselves into the text (Schreiner 1997c: 159 and passim). But if *bhakti* is none of these, then this search for "motives" is pointless, and not just because it brings positivistic research into unknowable territory. Rather, the question itself is flawed. If *bhakti* is not a pre-fabricated doctrine, but instead the name for the philosophical and intellectual project of the *Mahābhārata*, it makes no sense to ask about the when and the what and the why and the who of its "interpolation". This view of texts as nothing more than a battleground for rival religious sects to fight out their doctrinal conflicts (because — allegedly — brāhmaṇas have nothing better to do than to dominate and control others) proves to be an obsession of the modern critic, itself born out of a Lutheran obsession with "purifying"

—> his thesis that the brāhmaṇas had to accept a compromise with the kṣatriya religion as the price for their aggrandization (1910: 541).

[21] Grierson does not list the *Bhagavadgītā* here, which he regards more as a "treaty of peace" concluded between the adherents of "Brahmaism" and the "Brahmaized anti-Brahmaists [i.e., the Bhāgavatas following their absorption]" (1910: 541).

scripture.[22] Having shown the problems with both "text–historical" and "religion–historical" approaches to *bhakti*, I now wish to approach *bhakti* from a different perspective, via the literary–philosophical approach developed by Madeleine Biardeau.

Bhakti in a Literary–Philosophical Perspective

In her studies on the epic, Biardeau sets out from the premise that there is a certain complementarity between cosmology and eschatology (1976: 111). She rejects the view of *bhakti* as a religion later overlaid with philosophical doctrines; instead, she argues that it developed in parallel with philosophies within the same conceptual order (ibid.). Biardeau also rejects the theory of *bhakti* as a monotheistic religion along the lines of Christianity. She writes:

> Within the complexity of the universe of Hinduism, the permanence of the narratives and of the role of the great divinities of *bhakti* is always the same, whatever the name given to the supreme divinity, forcing us to reconsider the relation of the sects within Hinduism as a whole.
> — ibid.

Biardeau does not deny that there is an element of devotion or ecstatic love to *bhakti*, but she argues that the "inexhaustible source of grace" characteristic of *bhakti* "feeds less from the love of God for his creatures than from his yogic impartiality concerning the whole" (ibid.: 115). This leads her to formulate her first insight into the complementarity of *yoga* and *bhakti*. Thus she speaks of a "mythic re-use" of *yoga* by *bhakti*. She writes:

> we will have to grant that the essential link between the nature of the yogic God and that universalism which is totally free of *bhakti* will reappear, at the most unexpected moment, as the one (same) principle of intelligibility. — ibid.: 116

Finally, two aspects of Biardeau's reading of *bhakti* are important for the purposes of my study: its role in making salvation possible for

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[22] Weber explicitly argues for such a project in a letter of 1855 (see Sengupta 2004: 278-79).

all by universalizing the values of renunciation (ibid.: 173); and its simultaneous maintenance and sanctification of the sacrificial hierarchy and values with which it is associated, whilst also locating these within an absolute system (ibid.: 181-82).

Biardeau has frequently been criticized for being "unhistorical" or "anti-historical", but this criticism is unjustified: Biardeau does not reject historical considerations, but simply prefers to work out finely textured histories of ideas rather than accept fetish histories. Hiltebeitel contrasts the two approaches as follows:

> One model is to treat the history of Hinduism in relatively discrete stages: the sacrificial religion of the Brāhmaṇas; the Upaniṣadic way of knowledge; *bhakti* in the late Upaniṣads; epics, Purāṇas, and sectarian traditions; *tantra* (impacting upon the latter two); and either sidelight or limelight treatment of the development of the philosophical systems. Though Biardeau is not alone in insisting that there are important areas of overlap, particularly between the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, on the one hand, and *bhakti* and *tantra*, on the other, her work pioneers in delineating the way in which *bhakti* "englobes" sacrificial and Upaniṣadic values.   —Hiltebeitel 1983: 207

In her study of Hinduism, Biardeau provides a trenchant critique of the former approach. Rhetorically raising the question, "So is there a history, at least in very ancient times (second millenium BC), in which people speaking the Indo-European form of languages penetrate into India and, through their Brahmans, draw up the religious texts which will constitute the Veda?", she answers with barely concealed distrust: "Maybe" (Biardeau 1989: 6). Then she continues:

> But what if this seemingly historical structuring only existed in our minds; and perhaps even implicitly took its model from our most recent history? Between the assertion that ethnically and culturally different peoples must have learnt over the centuries to coexist, and the assertion that their cohabitation explains the present-day socio-religious structure of Hindu India, there is a gulf which cannot be crossed without examination.   —ibid.

In fact, against fetish histories of a corrupt, doctrinaire, and un-

enlightened Brāhmanism, Biardeau points out that:

> Orthodox Brahmanism, which is closer to the Revelation, is not the ancestor of modern Hinduism; it is its permanent heart, the implicit model for or/and against which *bhakti*, tantrism and all their sects have been constituted. It has moreover persisted to the present day, changing as little as possible to respond to the needs of the hour, living in castes of Brahmans of whom it is the *raison d'être*.   — ibid.: 15

Biardeau does not deny religious development within the Indian context, but she is clear that any religious history of India must simultaneously take the form of a history of the steps by which the adherents of one or more religions *self-consciously and knowingly* set in motion logical, philosophical, or literary developments.[23] For Biardeau, this development culminates in the creation of the "universe of *bhakti*", the religion of devotion, "an imposing edifice of many dimensions — cosmogony and cosmology, theology and anthropology" (ibid.: 69). Rather than developing "alongside brahmanic orthodoxy", *bhakti* "subsumed it and adapted its structure to take account of it, in one of those specifically Indian enveloping moves" (ibid.). In fact, the "upheaval" introduced by *bhakti* is "much more radical" (ibid.: 85) than text–historical scholars can imagine, because it does not just insert itself (informed by hazy Christian antecedents) into one or two texts, but undertakes a complete "re-reading of the Revelation [i.e. the Vedic canon] which gave birth to a mythic and ritual universe of very great complexity" (ibid.: 90). It is this intellectual quality that accounts for *bhakti*'s literary and philosophical fecundity, and its far-ranging impact on Indian culture.

This approach to *bhakti*, from the perspective of the literary and philosophical activity that must have gone on behind the concept if it was

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[23] The main problem with contemporary approaches to the sociology of Indian religions is that they deny the participants any conscious role in the development of ideas. Allegedly, religious developments are always imposed top-down by a corrupt clergy on an unsuspecting laity. Once one grants this view of religion, any change can only be understood as a perversion and a fall away from the purity of the original Revelation. For the deep Protestant anxieties this interpretive framework reflects, see Gelders and Derde 2003.

to develop at all, has radical consequences for the concept of salvation. What is at stake here can no longer be a simple relation of "beg[ging] for grace and hav[ing] faith in [God]". Rather, as Biardeau incisively grasps, the superficial stories of salvation as attaining paradisiacal worlds (whether "the world of Viṣṇu" or "the world of Śiva") should not blind us to the very real commonality between concepts of Brāhmanical liberation and *bhakti*.[24] *Bhakti*, to be sure, undertakes a mythic re-reading of this traditional idea, but not without sharing its essential structural principles. "If we turn back to the Purāṇas, on which we saw the cosmogonic and cosmological framework of bhakti being built up", a different state of affairs reveals itself to us:

> Since the supreme Puruṣa is the yogin who manifests himself in the rhythm of the great temporal periods by manifesting the universe, individual salvation has to be integrated into this rhythm and must also translate in its own way the hierarchy of the values which the successive levels of the cosmogony brought to light. It is the accounts of cosmic reabsorption which inform us about this, and, at the same time, they reveal a whole structure of the cosmos which has not so far become apparent. —ibid.:108-09

Biardeau, who approaches the epic in reverse (i.e. having first studied Indian philosophy and then read the Purāṇas), is thus superbly placed to grasp the significance of *bhakti* in the epic. Her work also provides the appropriate staging-point for us to approach the *Nārāyaṇīya*. I will show that the very facets of *bhakti* identified by Biardeau — its complementarity with the yogic path, its intellectual dimension, its literary and philosophical qualities, and its ability to offer a cognitive framework for ordering a set of values — are all clearly manifest in the *Nārāyaṇīya*.

Bhakti in the Nārāyaṇīya

As we saw above, the *Nārāyaṇīya* occurs towards the end of the highly

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[24] For an interpretation that opposes Vaiṣṇava to Śaiva concepts of heaven, see Stietencron 2005: 223-24. Stietencron's work has recently been criticized by Nicholson (2010: 201-02). For a discussion of the ideological underpinnings of this debate, see Adluri 2012.

soteriological Mokṣadharmaparvan.[25] Every aspect of the *Nārāyaṇīya*, including its location within the Mokṣadharmaparvan, is significant. The *Nārāyaṇīya* occurs immediately after the *Śuka-carita*, a section of ten chapters that narrates the story of Śuka's birth, his pedagogy, and his quest for final liberation. This section constitutes a kind of prologue to the *Nārāyaṇīya*: it both broaches the theme of salvation and, ultimately, clarifies the limitations of the yogic path. Thus a comparison of the opening sections of both texts is illuminating.

The *Śuka-carita* begins with questions asked by Yudhiṣṭhira:

Yudhiṣṭhira said:
How was Śuka of great penance, the embodiment of *dharma*, born to Vyāsa?
How did he attain supreme perfection — please tell me that, O Grandsire!
And on what woman did Vyāsa, rich in austerity, beget Śuka?
For we do not know the mother or the preeminent birth of this great soul.
And how, even as a child, did [his mind] turn to subtle knowledge,
As is not the case of anyone else here in this world?
I desire to hear this in detail, O highly lustrous one!
For I am not satiated listening here to your excellent nectar-like words.
Please tell me, O Grandsire, duly and in order,
The greatness and the concentration on the self and the wisdom of
Śuka!   — *Mahābhārata* 12.310.1-5

Yudhiṣṭhira's first question contains a play on words: *vyāsasya dharmātmā . . . jajñe* can be taken in the sense of Vyāsa's son Śuka, but also in the sense of the essence of the *dharma* engendered by Vyāsa. This *dharma*, in turn, can be interpreted in both a wider and a narrower sense: in the wider sense as the *dharma* that governs worldly affairs and encompasses

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[25] On the structure of the Mokṣadharmaparvan, see Brockington 2008. Brockington rejects Zaehner's view of a progression within the Mokṣadharmaparvan (see Zaehner 1963) on the grounds that the *Uñchavṛtty-Upākhyāna* rather than the *Nārāyaṇīya* is the concluding section of this text. I address these issues in Adluri 2011d, but see also my comments on the relationship of *nivṛtti, pravṛtti*, and *uñchavṛtti dharma*s above.

three of the four *puruṣārtha*s, and in the narrower sense as the *dharma* conducive to the fourth *puruṣārtha* or *mokṣadharma*. This doubling is also repeated in the story of Śuka, because Śuka is the first of Vyāsa's students to achieve *mokṣa*. The story of his quest for salvation, narrated at length in the run-up to the *Nārāyaṇīya*, establishes the context of the *Nārāyaṇīya* as a transcendence that goes beyond the textual universe of the *Mahābhārata*. Let us see how this quest unfolds.

Yudhiṣṭhira's questions articulate a concern with how to attain the highest goal (*siddhiṁ . . . paramāṁ*). In his response, Bhīṣma indicates that austerity is at the root of every achievement, including salvation (*tapomūlam idaṁ sarvaṁ*, 12.310.7). Bhīṣma then recounts the stages of Śuka's journey from birth to final liberation. The journey comprises four stages, as follows:

1. Śuka gains complete knowledge of the Vedas and the Vedāṅgas and their commentaries, augmented by knowledge of the epic and the science of administration (12.311.23).

2. He receives instruction from King Janaka on how to achieve emancipation (12.312.6).

3. He establishes himself in the Self (12.314.1).

4. He takes recourse to *yoga* (12.318.52; cf. also 12.318.53 and 59).

Śuka's case, however, is unique: he is a twice-born brāhmaṇa, an adept at *yoga*, capable of great austerity, and endowed with great energy or spirit (*tejas*). Further, he receives instruction from a succession of great teachers: his father Vyāsa, the sage Nārada, and King Janaka. His situation cannot be universalized to all beings. The soteriological path identified with his name relates to the "gnostic" or "sannyāsic" order (to use Biardeau's terms). Thus, if the epic is to achieve its claim of being a Mokṣaśāstra and a Veda for all classes of beings (12.314.45), it will have to return to the question of salvation again. This is precisely what it does in the *Nārāyaṇīya*.

Before we turn to the *Nārāyaṇīya*, however, let us examine the Śuka narrative more closely. In 12.318, Bhīṣma narrates a dialogue between Nārada and Śuka concerning the problems with *pravṛtti* and embodiment,

beginning with birth. In 12.319, Śuka begins his journey to emancipation, flying like Garuḍa.[26] The motif of flight not only recalls Garuḍa's ascent in the Āstīkaparvan (Mbh 1.20-30), but also the idea of "being seen" by all beings:

tam udyantaṁ dvijaśreṣṭhaṁ vainateyasamadyutim ।
dadṛśuḥ sarvabhūtāni manomārutaraṁhasam ॥

As that best of twice-born ones, endowed with radiance equal to

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[26] The appearance of Garuḍa in the Śāntiparvan is quite infrequent, yet significant. He appears in unrelated passages in the Śāntiparvan in the form of "Tārkṣya" at 12.43.8, 12.46.34, and 12.48.14. But in the forms of "Garut-" and "Vainateya", he appears only in the Mokṣadharmaparvan, and only in the Śuka and *Nārāyaṇīya* narratives. In the form of "Suparṇa" he appears in three scattered references (12.37.18, 12.47.28, and 12.52.31). However, most significantly, Garuḍa also appears as "Suparṇa" once within the Mokṣadharmaparvan, as Bhīṣma is expounding on the marks of future greatness and degeneration in a chapter (12.221) exactly 100 chapters before the *Nārāyaṇīya*. This chapter marks a critical juncture: it is the end of the first segment of ascent, which is dominated by Indra, and the beginning of the second segment, in which Nārada will be the chief character who slowly traces the journey to the ultimate goal represented in the *Nārāyaṇīya*. These two segments relate to each other as the *pravṛtti* ascent or the "first transcendence" relates to the *nivṛtti* ascent (the "second transcendence"), as I have argued in Adluri 2011d. Whereas the first transcendence culminates in the attainment of Indra's heaven, the second leads beyond it to Brahman (which in the epic is often associated with Viṣṇu). In the present passage, the limits of the first transcendence are indicated by Bali's words to Indra in the *Bali–Vāsava Saṁvāda*: Bali tells Indra that many thousands of Indras have passed away before him and that he, too, will one day be destroyed by Time (*bahūnīndrasahasrāṇi samatītāni vāsava* । *balavīryopapannāni yathaiva tvaṁ śacīpate* ॥ 12.217.54). Thereafter, Śrī is introduced. At this juncture of the "going down of Indra" and the "rising up of Nārada", both of these figures go to bathe in the Ganges, which has issued out of "Dhruva" (*dhruvadvārabhavāṁ*, 12.221.6). They see the same Śrī, now no longer shining in the temporal cycles of Indras, but appearing in the direction *opposite* to the day-star as a "second sun", mounted on Garuḍa (*ākāśe dadṛśe jyotir udyatārciḥsamaprabham* ॥ *tayoḥ samīpaṁ saṁprāptaṁ pratyadṛśyata bhārata* । *tat suparṇārkacaritam āsthitaṁ vaiṣṇavaṁ padam* । *bhābhir apratimaṁ bhāti trailokyam avabhāsayat* ॥ 12.221.11c-12f). Garuḍa here must signify the *vaiṣṇavaṁ padam* or the soteriological goal.

Garuḍa, was ascending in the skies with the speed of the wind or thought, all creatures gazed up at him.   — *Mahābhārata* 12.319.11

In 12.320, Bhīṣma describes how Śuka, casting off the three *guṇa*s, became established in Brahman, blazing like a smokeless fire (*brahmaṇi pratyatiṣṭhat sa vidhūmo 'gnir iva jvalan* ॥ 12.320.3cd). We learn how he dashed against the twin peaks of Meru and Himavat, and how he went to his ultimate goal. We hear of how his father Vyāsa followed him, but could not stop his son from attaining the ultimate goal. A dialogue between the grieving father Vyāsa and Rudra concludes the narrative. Bhīṣma sums up the story of Śuka, the ultimate paradigm of ascent to liberation, with the following words:

> *itihāsam imaṁ puṇyaṁ mokṣadharmārthasaṁhitam* ।
> *dhārayed yaḥ śamaparaḥ sa gacchet paramāṁ gatim* ॥

> That person devoted to tranquillity who hears this sacred history directly connected with the topic of Emancipation is certain to attain to the highest end.   — *Mahābhārata* 12.320.41; tr. Ganguli 1891: 738-39[27]

This cursory summary of the section preceding the *Nārāyaṇīya* shows that Bhīṣma has already introduced and demonstrated, through examples, all the relevant aspects of liberation. Yet, in the next chapter (the *Nārāyaṇīya*'s first), Yudhiṣṭhira repeats the question about liberation:

> Yudhiṣṭhira said:
> A householder or a student, a hermit or a mendicant,
> If one wishes to obtain perfection, what god ought he adore?
> How indeed can he obtain infallible heaven and [beyond it,] the ultimate good?
> By following which injunction ought he to sacrifice to the gods and ancestors?
> When liberated, where does one go? And what is the nature of liberation?
> Having attained to heaven, what must one do so as not to fall?
> Which god is the god of gods and the ancestor of ancestors?

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[27] This is the last line of chapter 334 in Ganguli; the numbers differ, as he follows the text of the Vulgate.

And what transcends even him? Tell me all this, O Grandfather!
— *Mahābhārata* 12.321.1-4

Unlike his previous inquiry, however, this question no longer concerns the ascent of a twice-born brāhmaṇa, but has been universalized so as to encompass all four *āśrama*s. It is thus only appropriate that when Bhīṣma begins his response, he introduces a new factor in the soteriological stakes: *devaprasāda* (divine grace, 12.321.6). Bhīṣma further sets aside *tarka* (logic) and, in the narrative that unfolds, we also see that neither the sacrifice performed by Bṛhaspati nor the asceticism undertaken by Ekata, Dvita, and Trita on Śvetadvīpa are adequate for viewing the One. Yet we should not hastily assume that this means that the *Nārāyaṇīya*'s proposed solution, exclusive and one-pointed devotion (*ekāntabhāva*) towards the One, is simply an irrational state of passion or rapture. Biardeau criticizes this view of *bhakti* as a "religion of more or less unbridled emotions" (1989: 89). The universalization of the *Mahābhārata*'s soteriological project that is undertaken in the *Nārāyaṇīya* does not necessarily imply a devaluation or a rejection of the previous views. Rather, as Biardeau rightly sees, the epic undertakes a superb synthesis of these various views. The sacrificial, soteriological, and self-relational themes broached in the Śuka narrative are not simply cast aside, but are incorporated within a new hierarchy of values. Thus, when Nārada lists his qualifications for viewing the highest form of Nārāyaṇa before he sets out to visit Śvetadvīpa, he lists all four components of Śuka's pedagogy, but to these he now appends a fifth: one-pointed devotion (*ekāntabhāva*, 12.332.4).

Bhīṣma's narrative, much decried by Oberlies for its alleged "lack of cohesion and homogeneity" (1997a: 75), also contains rich clues to this project of "englobing" Vedic and yogic knowledge in a new saving philosophy that is simultaneously devotional and intellectual. For example, although Bhīṣma resumes the soteriological narrative, he now takes it a step back, including Nārada himself in the narrative of ascent. Further, like 12.320, the last chapter before the *Nārāyaṇīya*, the *Nārāyaṇīya* also introduces a dialogue with Rudra, but here Vyāsa is replaced by his cosmological counterpart Brahmā.[28] Soteriology is

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[28] On the Brahmā–Vyāsa analogy, see Sullivan 1994.

universalized here (for everybody), and includes not just the father Vyāsa but, in the guise of Brahmā, the whole of creation. The twin peaks of Meru and Himavat that mark Śuka's ascent to the One in the previous narrative are replaced by a series of doubles: the pair Nara and Nārāyaṇa, and the dyadic beings on Śvetadvīpa. Further, contradicting every theory of *bhakti* as a "soft-core" philosophy, the problem of the relation of the dyad to the One, which was only implicit in the Śuka narrative, is made explicit in the *Nārāyaṇīya*. The entire *Nārāyaṇīya*, in all its various stages and sub-narratives, unfolds as a single sustained meditation on this topic.[29] Finally, the *Nārāyaṇīya* not only develops the theme of the soteriological ascent to the One, but balances this with a cosmology that clarifies the descent of the One into multiplicity. The text explores this descent not only in terms of ontology (the four *vyūha*s) and cosmogony (the birth of Brahmā and the creation of the worlds), but also in terms of an ontic descent (Nārāyaṇa's *avatāra*s to restore *dharma*) and a soteriological descent (the notion of grace).

Conclusion

This paper has previewed only a small part of what is a much longer argument concerning *bhakti* in the *Mahābhārata*. My main aim was to clear away pervasive misunderstandings of *bhakti* as a cult-emotive phenomenon, as a first step towards a fuller interpretation of the epic. If we look just at the way these two sections — the *Śuka-carita* and the *Nārāyaṇīya* — relate to each other, the thesis that the *Nārāyaṇīya* is a

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[29] This rigorous structure of the relationship between the One and the many, presented as an ascent and descent, is further underscored through the narrative of Vasu. The theme of comparison with Garuḍa, who features in Vasu's final ascent, aligns the *Nārāyaṇīya*'s soteriological project with the hermeneutic materials of the Ādiparvan (see Adluri 2011c). The *Nārāyaṇīya* self-consciously addresses the problems of time and eternity, "becoming" and "being", etc. that were set up in the first *parvan*, and it does so not only through the figures of Garuḍa and Vasu, but also through a clever manipulation of frames whereby the Naimiṣa setting is recalled (see Hiltebeitel 2006). Thus, seen from the point of view of its context in the Mokṣadharmaparvan, the *Nārāyaṇīya* already provides some very good reasons to discount the theses of Oberlies and the rest. The "breaks" are not uncomplicated textual anomalies, but rather part of a philosophical structure and argument.

late text "interpolated" into the Śāntiparvan at a later date cannot be maintained without other arguments. Nor are arguments based on the lateness of *bhakti* defensible, since the very "theory" of *bhakti* is a chimera of nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship.

As I have shown in this paper, the *Nārāyaṇīya* relates directly to the epic's central concern of the relation between eternity and time, or between "being" and "becoming". It takes up this problem in three ways:

1. From an ontological and cosmological perspective, it explores their relation in terms of the One and the many.

2. From a soteriological perspective, it explores their relation in terms of the motifs of ascent and descent, and in terms of the access to the One made possible through the devotional aspects of *bhakti.*

3. From a literary perspective, it develops an iconographic, mythographic, and ritual programme that serves to preserve these ontological and soteriological insights.

Thus, rather than seeing *bhakti* as either a movement or a religion,[30] we must learn to see it as the name for the philosophical, literary, and social project of the *Mahābhārata*: it is a revolution that preserves or englobes the Vedic and Upaniṣadic wisdom, while also incorporating textual traditions and concepts going backward and going forward, making it possible for Purāṇic literature to make sense. It is in this sense, I argue, that the *Nārāyaṇīya* is not only "original" to the epic, but also "originary".

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[30] I am not denying that there is also a *bhakti-mārga* (a soteriological path) or that *bhakti* engenders deep emotional responses (ecstatic, emotive); I am suggesting that these aspects are secondary to a more fundamental understanding of *bhakti. Bhakti-mārga* can lead to *mokṣa* only if the relationship between the One and the many is clarified in such a way that these secondary instantiations of *bhakti* are grounded in an ontological understanding. Otherwise, what distinguishes the intense emotion associated with ecstatic devotion from other forms of feeling?

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